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**NATIONAL EFFECTS-BASED APPROACH:  
A POLICY DISCUSSION PAPER**

*Brice Pacey*

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Brice has wide experience in Defence with appointments in the intelligence community, Army Headquarters, and Defence's International Policy Division. He is a former strategic analyst at the Office of National Assessments and Directorate of Army Research and Analysis, and has instructed at the United States Army Intelligence Centre and School. In recent years, he has been a strategic and operational analyst in the private sector.

Brice Pacey's previous Working Paper No. 148 was entitled *The Potential Role of Net Assessment in Australian Defence Planning*.

## **Abstract**

Growing strategic uncertainty and complexity, together with recent operational experience, have reinforced the need for Australia to adopt more inclusive and intellectually rigorous ways of planning for national security if the strategic surprises of recent years are to be avoided in the future.

The aim of this paper is to recommend improvements in the quality and timeliness of national security advice to the Prime Minister and Cabinet through stronger national security staffing arrangements and measures to strengthen the development of whole-of-government national security policy.

# **National Effects-Based Approach: A Policy Discussion Paper**

*Brice Pacey*

## **Introduction**

Regional instability, the rise of terrorism and the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction present Australia with significant future security challenges. Many of these challenges will fall within what is often described as the new security agenda; however some will arise with little or no warning in unfamiliar or remote theatres, or involve unconventional or asymmetrical strategies by the protagonists. Strategic uncertainty has become the defining characteristic of the international setting. All of these challenges will be met within an international system undergoing great change, and under the scrutiny of pervasive media.

The response to these challenges will need to comprehend growing interdependence within the international system and to acknowledge the increasing role of international institutions. At the national level, a response to security challenges will increasingly involve non-military and non-traditional dimensions. Meanwhile, domestic security issues will affect national security planning in a way not seen since World War II.

Australia has achieved remarkable success in the first conflicts of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. However, the margins of success have been thin and exposed flaws in a strategic planning process that has failed to anticipate or prepare for commitments outside the narrow constructs of the then prevailing defence orthodoxy. Growing strategic uncertainty and complexity, together with recent operational experience, have reinforced the need for Australia to adopt more inclusive and intellectually rigorous ways of planning for national security if the strategic surprises of recent years are to be avoided in the future.

The aim of this paper is to recommend improvements in the quality and timeliness of national security advice to the Prime Minister and Cabinet through stronger national security staffing arrangements and measures to strengthen the development of whole-of-government national security policy.

## **National Effects-Based Operations**

A national effects<sup>1</sup>-based approach is a strategy for thinking about and organising Australia's security in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, and responding to complex new security challenges with all those tools available to government and the Australian community as a whole. National effects can be defined as the physical, functional or psychological outcomes, events or consequences that result from specific military or non-military actions at the strategic level in times of peace and war. The aim of national security planning should be to present government with options to employ national effects in order to gain a favourable strategic end state<sup>2</sup> that can be sustained over the long-term, while shaping the future strategic environment in ways that are favourable to Australia.

The means used to achieve national effects are drawn from all of the elements of national power and influence, requiring the careful integration and balancing of diplomatic, economic, information and military response options. In this emerging environment, it is important to recognise that Defence will be only one agency dealing with national security problems and will frequently not be the lead. National effects are the outcome from a coordinated whole-of-government response to strategic challenges — challenges that can be military, criminal, economic or political in character. National effects-based operations embrace the orchestrated use of different elements of national power, and can include measures such as:

- diplomacy through international institutions;
- economic sanctions;
- the threat of military intervention; and
- the promise of support to achieve economic and political reforms.

The development of a national effects-based approach requires improvements to Australia's methods for strategic planning. The approach needs to be based on a deep understanding of Australia's possible adversaries, the current strategic environment, the national mood, and where Australia's national interest collides with the interests of other nations. This type of approach requires an ongoing planning effort that links assessment agencies, policy advisers and operational planners in the one staff. The planning should generally focus on medium to longer term issues, but the staff should be prepared to manage the transition to crisis management.

## **Management of National Effects – The NSCC and SCONS**

In 1996, the Government took a major step forward in strengthening national security policy-making when it gave a renamed National Security Committee of Cabinet (NSCC) a wider range of responsibility. This committee is chaired by the Prime Minister and involves senior ministers (who hold portfolios on Australia's domestic and international security) meeting regularly to address a broad range of national security issues. The NSCC was recently expanded to include the Minister for Immigration and Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs. In discussions with the author, one former Minister described the NSCC as the best committee he ever sat on. Certainly, the establishment of the NSCC was the first and most important of a series of progressive improvements to the machinery as a whole.

At the official level, the Secretary of the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet chairs the Secretaries Committee on National Security (SCONS), with representation drawn from relevant departments and the intelligence agencies.

### **Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet**

A further strengthening of the system is likely to flow from the recent decision to establish a National Security Division<sup>3</sup> within the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet (PM&C) (refer Annex A). The relevant policy departments and the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet support the NSCC and SCONS. PM&C plays the central role in ensuring that policy proposals put to these senior committees are developed in a coherent, informed and coordinated fashion. The Defence, Intelligence and Security Branch within the International Division has had the prime responsibility for advising the Prime Minister on defence, security, intelligence and law enforcement issues, including counter-terrorism, arms control and regional security matters. The Branch has also traditionally provided the secretariat for the NSCC and SCONS, although it seems that, under revised arrangements, a new Cabinet Division will perform this role, thereby freeing members of the Branch to focus on policy rather than administrative tasks.

Importantly, the new National Security Division will deal with both domestic and international security issues, at a time when the distinction is becoming blurred. The International Division will continue to play a vital role in supporting the operations of the NSCC and SCONS in partnership with the National Security Division recognising that, while much has changed in the security environment, there are also important areas of continuity.

Of 24 staff within the International Division, only five have operated in the Defence Branch. Still, the staffing arrangements have been flexible and responsive to demands in the security environment. Staff have been pulled in from elsewhere in PM&C and other departments during crises or when tasks require additional resources or broader expertise. For example, special task forces were created to deal with Australian commitments to Afghanistan and Iraq.

Of the 129 files within the International Division, 35 titles deal with defence and security related matters, including one active file for each of the NSCC and SCONS. However, no file title seems to deal with long-term strategic issues, or to provide evidence of a structured approach to national security issues.

Regular contact with the Defence Branch suggests staff of the highest quality and commitment, but the breadth of the Branch's responsibilities and its small size may have precluded any detailed consideration of long-term strategic issues and may have contributed to the impression that arrangements during periods of high demand are improvised with varying degrees of success.

### **Remaining Concerns about Current Arrangements**

Improvements to the operations of the NSCC and SCONS have been a major achievement of the current government, but problems may persist at lower levels. There have been concerns about the resources and machinery to support these vital senior bodies. There have also been questions about the capacity of a small and busy staff to devote time to considering longer-term security issues from a whole-of-government perspective and to support the NSCC in particular in assessing strategic options in an increasingly complex and uncertain strategic setting.

There is evidence that the handling of each important national security issue in recent years has required the establishment of ad hoc committees and the relearning of lessons from previous national security challenges. Constant crisis management has diverted staff from analysing large long-term strategic issues. Unlike the post World War II generation, the current generation of strategic planners has not yet regulated and institutionalised the national security machinery in the light of their experience.

The new National Security Division has the potential to bring about the needed change, but only if the niggling limitations of the existing arrangements are addressed. These limitations include the following:

- There has been no formal interdepartmental committee or body to plan a national effects-based approach, and to advise the NSCC and SCONS on matters of judgement and balance at the national level; yet the need for such a committee or body has been demonstrated by the creation of ad hoc arrangements for all military commitments made by Australia in the post-Cold War era, including East Timor, Afghanistan and Iraq.
- There has been no organisation charged with maintaining an institutional memory of lessons learned in national crises as a means of improving the handling of new crises and issues. The lack of any permanent structure has meant that, during each new commitment, there has been a need to relearn old lessons. The expanded national security staff should be directed to capture these lessons and establish standard procedures and plans that can be adapted to specific circumstances.
- There has been no organisation resourced to remain focused on long-term strategic or national security issues. The principals involved in the NSCC and SCONS have a wide variety of demands on their time, including the administration of the largest and most complex departments of state. While they can draw upon the resources of their respective departments, they generally lack access to a staff that can be relied on to draw strategic policy from an independent national perspective.
- The Policy Planning Unit in the Prime Minister's Office also has wide responsibilities and suffers from resource constraints that may have made it difficult to sustain the effort required to support the NSCC and SCONS in their strategic planning function. Overall, the central policy staff have been sufficient only to deal with current — frequently urgent — defence and strategic issues, putting aside important longer-term issues, other than the periodic focus on White Papers from the Departments of Defence or Foreign Affairs and Trade.
- The absence of a strong central strategic policy body has increased the risk of departmental issues being pursued at the expense of the national interest. Foreign Affairs officers may seek time for diplomacy while military chiefs seek time and resources for preparations. Both may seem to be pursuing aims that are contrary to Australia's economic interests, and each of them may fail to fully appreciate the domestic political or trade context of their actions. A permanent central policy staff, ideally located in the Prime Minister's Office or Department, can best carry out an analysis of competing claims and policy recommendations. The role of such staff would be to service the SCONS and NSCC, whilst linking

and synchronising the work of the Departments — much more than a simple coordinating function.

- There are continuing deficiencies in the decision support tools used in strategic policy formulation at the national level. There does not appear to be any systematic application of decision support tools designed for national security planning such as net assessment or assumption based planning.

### **Sharpened Expectations of Australia's Regional and Global Role**

Unfortunately, these deficiencies have affected strategic policy formulation at a time when there are sharpened expectations of Australia's regional and global role, and a growing realisation of Australia's will and capabilities to contribute to that role. Australian contributions to the crises in East Timor, Afghanistan and Iraq have been considerably greater than the purely symbolic contribution comprehended by defence orthodoxy from the mid-1980s to the late 1990s. Australia is, in effect, gaining weight as a middle power, and demonstrating a willingness to use that weight in pursuit of wider security objectives. Canberra needs strategic planning machinery commensurate with that weight.

The period between 1999 and 2003 has seen a transformation in Australia's strategic setting and international role. Following East Timor, Australian security constructs have expanded to include a larger, and possibly leading, role in future regional crises. Australia's actions during this period have created expectations of Australian resolve and preparedness among allies and within the region.

Following Afghanistan and Iraq, it is clear that both government and the public expect Australia to make more than a symbolic commitment to broader global security. This includes a commitment to collective western security within the context of US led coalitions, or in an ideal but vaguely elusive future, UN or regional coalitions.

Furthermore, recent conflicts have highlighted the expectation that, when dealing with the problems of failed states, military operations will need to transition smoothly and quickly to nation-building, making concurrent planning vital. This was demonstrated in Iraq when international and domestic public opinion had an expectation that the nation-building role should have started prior to the cessation of hostilities.

This requirement will demand greater clarity about the desired strategic end-state. It is no longer enough to seek an end to hostilities on terms favourable to Australia. A durable peace involves timely reconstruction in order to achieve broader and longer-term political and economic conditions. Planning for reconstruction will have to start concurrently with military planning and operations and involve both government and non-government agencies.

Chief of the Defence Force General Peter Cosgrove has recounted how in East Timor, 'in the space of one day and one kilometre around the restricted terrain of Dili, a soldier could be involved in an emergency food distribution, a vehicle control point and a clearing patrol'. This is a growing trend in war described by US Marine Corps General C C Krulak as a '3 Block War', 'where forces transit between humanitarian assistance, peacekeeping and combat operations within a restricted locality and time'.<sup>4</sup> Winning the '3 Block War' requires a professional military force and a range of deployable nation-building capabilities, with a clear way to link both in a seamless transition between fighting and restoration operations.

### **Growing Australian Capabilities to Achieve National Effects**

The present government has gained an unprecedented level of access and influence in London and Washington. This influence has been achieved without compromising relations with regional powers such as Beijing and Tokyo, although some smaller regional capitals have at times mounted prickly responses to current issues. The Australian economy has demonstrated the benefits of a long period of structural reform in its resilience during global and regional economic shocks over the last decade.

The Australian Defence Force has reinforced a deserved reputation for capability and professionalism, notwithstanding the compromises caused firstly by a protracted period of austerity, and secondly by the effects of a post-Vietnam strategic orthodoxy that might have been challenged more readily by a national security staff. Furthermore, Australian citizens have demonstrated the national will to play a much broader role than that narrow role prescribed to the ADF, a role which, in many ways, left the ADF ill-prepared for its deployment to East Timor, Afghanistan and Iraq.

## **Specialist Skills for Dealing with the New Security Agenda**

A further need for improved strategic planning machinery will flow from Australia's emergence as the dominant and most affluent middle power in the region. A robust economy and a highly developed domestic scientific and industrial base have enabled Australia to develop unique capabilities to respond to Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD) and terrorist incidents, including those involving a chemical, biological or radiological element. As few regional states have either the resources or will to develop similar capabilities, it seems prudent for Australia to plan responses to such incidents, especially given the reasonable expectation of requests from those same regional states.

In a similar vein, many of Australia's unique capabilities are things taken for granted in civil society in Australia. These include skills in forensic science, deployable and sustainable military forces, nation-building assets (such as medical, professional police forces, transportation, construction, communications), a capability to develop quality aid through government and non-government agencies, an independent national media, and a professional foreign service. This skill base provides Australia with a range of options to contribute to collective security. The remarkably effective cooperation between Australian and Indonesian police post-Bali provides a clear demonstration of the contribution of non-military dimensions to national security.

## **The Benefits of a National Security Planning Body**

The new National Security Division should be able to assist, at least in part, in both developing a response to new demands on Australia's strategic capabilities and addressing the lingering concerns about the existing national security machinery. Benefits arising from an expanded staff and responsibilities should include:

- An emphasis on forward planning so that Australia can better plan for, and manage, its future.
- A culture of departmental engagement through an analysis of national security issues from a whole-of-government perspective.

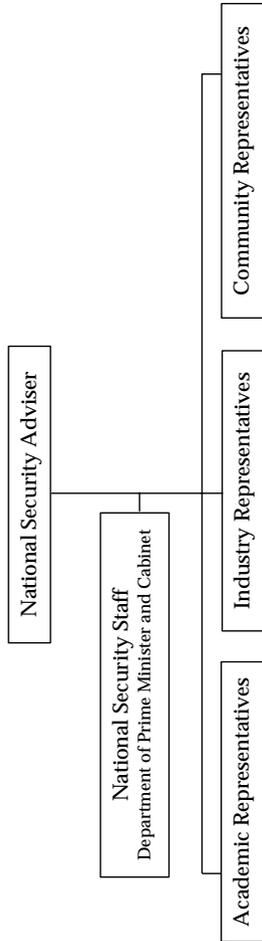
- A consistent framework for dealing with national security issues and the management of crises.
- Improved long-term national security planning by the addition of staff and resources dedicated to the task.
- Improved support to the PMO, NSCC and SCONS through an increase in the resources available to consider the national security agenda.
- Greater transparency in the strategic planning process by subsuming the functions of earlier and only partially effective bodies that operated without formal direction or processes.
- An environment for developing national security staff equipped to deal with the challenges of the new security agenda.
- A central reference point for dealing with domestic and foreign government and non-government agencies.

There is precedent for the establishment of a staff along these lines in the form of the Office of National Assessments.<sup>5</sup> However, the modest increases in staff proposed in this paper, and apparently envisaged in the establishment of the National Security Division, reflect the desire to reinforce, rather than replace, the existing mechanisms supporting the NSCC and SCONS.

Consideration should be given to supporting the operations of a small national security staff by accessing expertise within the broader community. This might be achieved through the appointment of a National Security Advisory Council, along the lines of the Board of the Reserve Bank, although without the accompanying statutory authority. Such a Council could draw on the experience of senior business leaders with an interest in security issues such as experienced Board members from major transportation and utilities companies and representatives from non-government aid agencies. A precedent for the Council might be found in the Foreign Affairs advisory body of academics and others that the government has found useful.

The National Security Advisory Council might look like this:

**Proposed National Security Advisory Council**



## **The Adoption of Decision Support Tools to Aid National Security Planning**

The issues that need to be addressed are not confined to organisational matters. Increased staffing will only bring the necessary results if the staff is committed to improving the analytical and decision support tools contributing to national security policy formulation.

One such tool ideally suited for use by a national security staff is net assessment<sup>6</sup>, which has demonstrated the potential to enhance planning in Defence during a series of ongoing exercises. Net assessment is an analytical process with the potential to add additional dimensions to strategic policy formulation. It is a comparative analysis of the elements of national security most commonly correlated with strategic weight.

The elements considered in a net assessment include the economic capacity to develop and sustain military forces, and demographic and geographic factors that either contribute to or constrain the projection of military power or the development of the capacity for extreme violence for political, economic or religious purposes. Net assessments draw together representatives from intelligence, law enforcement and operational communities around a well-trained and cohesive permanent staff. Increasingly, net assessments will have to comprehend the emergence of non-state actors with the potential to undermine national security or threaten civil society with catastrophic violence.

Net assessments involve comparisons of the best available estimates of a potential adversary's capabilities against the full resources of government. The comparisons are made within a range of realistic scenarios for the purposes of providing long-term guidance.

Additionally, a net assessment staff is likely to be well prepared to support any governmental response to a crisis because of the detailed rehearsals involved in the net assessment process. Wide involvement in the net assessment process would help prepare both the leadership and staff for future crises.

Still, net assessment is but one of the tools available to policy staffs in improving the strategic planning process. There are significant prospects for academia and industry to contribute to the adoption of better decision support tools.

## **Conclusions and Recommendations**

There have been perceived deficiencies in the current system. National security planning is growing in complexity, and there is a heightened expectation of the role that Australia will play in shaping the future security environment. Australia is developing unique resources in the region that would be more effective if used in an increasingly cohesive manner. The modest response recommended in this paper is to consolidate improvements in the national security machinery through the adoption of a model with three main elements:

1. Strengthened staff arrangements such as the establishment of the National Security Division within PM&C.
2. The establishment of a National Security Advisory Council with representation drawn from across the community.
3. The appointment of a senior adviser in the PMO to assist the PM and NSCC in the direction of the National Security Division and National Security Advisory Council.

In addition, consideration should be given to institutionalising the range of decision support tools, policies and procedures, in order to improve the rigour of the strategic planning process and to better support government during the preparatory phase of conflict, the transition to and during hostilities. This should include mechanisms to prepare for a successful transition to a durable peace.

The national security planning machinery should have the following characteristics:

- The national security team should be carefully weighted to ensure that it is seen as providing support for the NSCC and SCONS, not competition for the departments with traditional roles in national security policy formulation.
- The processes of the national security staff should be developed so as not to inhibit policy formulation with the addition of simply another bureaucratic layer.
- The best features of the machinery in the United States and Great Britain might usefully inform a structure. Nevertheless, these should be adapted to Australian circumstances — in other words to suit a middle, rather than a great, power.

- The staff should, at a minimum, reflect the existing membership of the SCONS and NSCC. Staff should include those drawn from the Departments represented by Ministers in the strategic leadership and decision-making bodies.
- For specific tasks, the staff should be augmented with experts from other departments and agencies, and possibly representatives from broader constituencies such as aid groups and industry.
- The central role of the Prime Minister in national security should be supported by the appointment of a national security adviser in the Prime Minister's Office.
- The national security staff should be directed to adopt more intellectually rigorous decision support tools to support the operations of the NSCC and SCONS.
- Consideration should be given to the operations of a National Security Advisory Council with the responsibility of providing advice to the Prime Minister and NSCC from sectors of the community that have an interest in national security. The NSAC might provide a useful mechanism for overseeing the development of national security discussion papers on emerging topics of national security interest that may not emerge from the existing policy departments.

In order to consolidate the new machinery, specific initial tasking for the national security staff should include:

- The capture of processes that have seen success in earlier crises.
- The rendering of assistance to the NSCC and SCONS in national security policy formulation.
- Assuming the leadership role in the development of long term strategic policy.
- The implementation of processes for transition to crisis management where shaping actions are perceived to have failed.

The Prime Minister and Secretary of the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet will need to lead the establishment of any new national security framework. Initial implementation might involve the following steps:

- The critical first step is the appointment of a national security adviser or head of the National Security Division, with clear authority to implement change in close consultation with the NSCC and SCONS. The individual

selected will need to have demonstrated a broad strategic grasp, the ability to gain the trust and support of the political and departmental leadership, and the skills to maintain these over time. The first task of this individual should be to develop an implementation plan and to recruit key staff, assisted by a chief of staff who ideally has long experience of PM&C processes and culture. The ability to keep the Departments engaged and supportive will be essential to avoid debilitating turf wars.

- The second step should be the recruitment of a national security staff and to seek expressions of interest from the community in the formation of a National Security Advisory Council. In recognition of their capabilities and experience in the central policy area, the existing staff of the Defence Branch should provide the core element of a new staff. Given the complexities of the issues involved in long range strategic planning, it will be important to balance the need for a reasonable tenure against the need for organisational renewal and the rotation of staff over time.

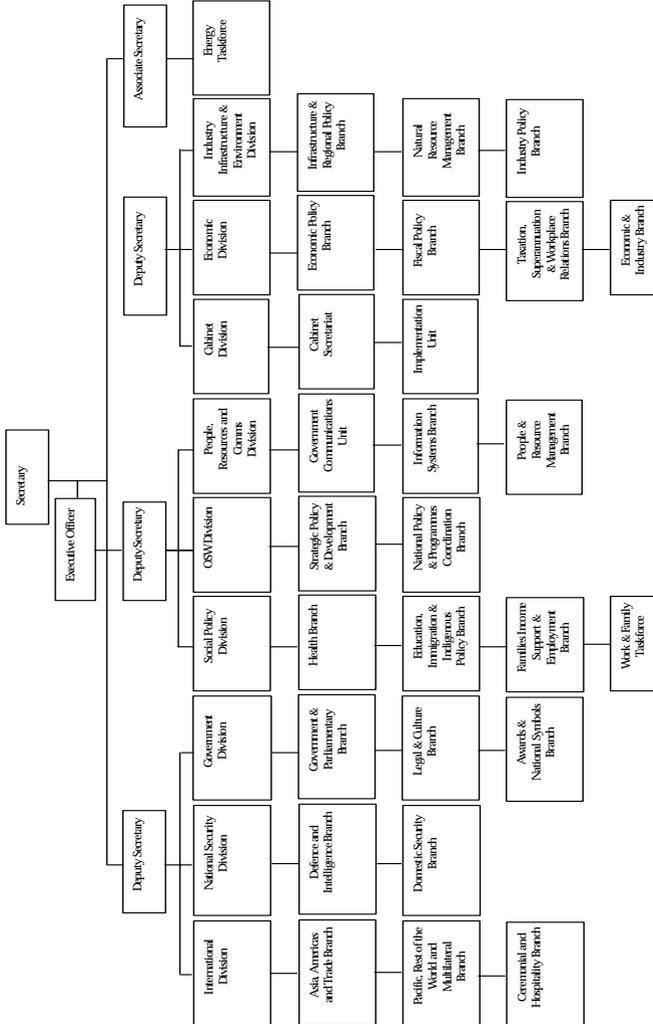
As these appointments are made, the staff should be tasked to progressively implement policies and procedures that address the shortcomings that have persisted despite improvements to the machinery as a whole. This will involve developing a culture of departmental engagement, institutionalising processes to support peacetime planning and the transition to conflict, and adopting decision support tools and processes to strengthen national strategic thinking.

## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> A description of national effects and their operational context can be found in the Australian Defence Force Publication *Future Warfighting Concept* dated December 2002, and prepared by the Policy Guidance and Analysis Division. The author has drawn heavily on this thought-provoking publication.
- <sup>2</sup> The strategic end state can be defined as the conditions that Australia would want to prevail after attaining its initial objectives.
- <sup>3</sup> A draft organisational structure for the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet is contained at Annex A. The chart indicates that a National Security Division will be formed with two branches: Defence and Intelligence, and Domestic Security.
- <sup>4</sup> Address to the Strategic and Defence Studies Centre on 19 May 2003, by former UN commander in East Timor and current Chief of the Australian Defence Force, General Peter Cosgrove.
- <sup>5</sup> The role of the Office of National Assessments is to produce analytical assessments of international developments. ONA produces reports, appreciations and assessments on international political, strategic and economic matters in order to assist the Prime Minister, Ministers and Departments in the formation of policy and plans. ONA is not subject to external direction on the content of its assessments, and is independent of any Department or Authority.
- <sup>6</sup> An early, yet more comprehensive description of net assessment can be found in the author's 1988 Strategic and Defence Studies Centre Working Paper No. 148 *The Potential Role of Net Assessment in Australian Defence Planning*.

# ANNEX A

## Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet New Organisation Structure



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